

Press release

15. January 2018

## *New exhibition: Christiansen in High Seas* *Neoromanticism in Henning Christiansen's 1970s art*

Official opening

18 January 2018 17.00 – 19.00

Exhibition run

19 January – 22 April 2018

Featured artists

Henning Christiansen, Mira Winding,  
Anders Lauge Meldgaard and LOL Beslutning



*TV art, Communist music and waltzing melodies. A new exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art focuses on an overlooked period within the work of Fluxus artist and composer Henning Christiansen.*

**Henning Christiansen wanted to create a better world. With lovely waltzes, melodies with popular appeal and romantic compositions. His project was part of a wider-ranging struggle against capitalism, EEC, smokescreens and evasive chitchat. Now the Museum of Contemporary Art shows an exhibition featuring rarely seen works from the 1970s by one of Denmark's greatest sound artists.**

### **From Fluxus and minimalism to neo-romanticism**

Henning Christiansen is known for his role in the Fluxus movement and for his stringent, minimalist works that led to new departures within the European art music scene. But around 1970 Christiansen began to write a very different kind of music. Romantic music that formed a complete contrast to his previous compositions. Up until this point, these works have been virtually absent from discussions of Christiansen's art in spite of the increasing attention it now attracts in Denmark and abroad.

In several texts and interviews, Christiansen describes how he sees a link between the sincerity of the music and an active moral and political outlook on the world. Describing one of his musical works, Henning Christiansen writes:

*This is a seed of visions of peaceful times without fascism and terrorism, a life where mankind works together and our abilities to delight each other, for example with music, come into full flower. Quite a few tweaks need to be made before then. Billions need to be redistributed for the good of everyone. We are on our way – halfway there – going forward might well involve beginning with all things good, letting good cut off the head of evil when it rears its roaring dragon's head. Just like in the good old fairy tales.*

### About the exhibition *Christiansen in High Seas*

In collaboration with DR (the Danish broadcasting corporation) and Henning Christiansen's Archives the museum will show rare TV works, scores, interviews and other objects that have never before been on display. The exhibition also features three works by young artists who inject a contemporary perspective on the emotionally charged earnestness and melodious qualities in Christiansen's compositions.

- **TV art on DR in the 1970s**

From the late 1960s onwards, Christiansen created several major TV works and wrote music for a range of films. Now, for the first time since the 1970s, the museum shows clips from two productions that Christiansen created for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR. The works in question are *Satie in High Seas* from 1974 and *The Eight-eyed Scorpion* from 1979.

- **The Deer Garden: The Romantic Forest**

Christiansen's music is also featured in the documentary art film *The Deer Garden: The Romantic Forest* [*Dyrehaven, den romantiske skov*] from 1969, directed by Per Kirkeby and Jørgen Leth. The film shows the 'Dyrehaven' parklands and forest north of Copenhagen through four seasons, drawing on the site's National Romantic associations in beautiful images reminiscent of the landscapes seen in Danish Golden Age art.

- **The Missing Bureaucrat**

Christiansen also wrote the music for the film based on Hans Scherfig's classic novel *The Missing Bureaucrat* [*Den forsvundne fuldmægtig*]. Selected parts of the music will be on display at the exhibition. The story is about a respectable bureaucrat, played by Ove Sprogøe, who fakes his own suicide and then begins a new life with a new identity. Writing about *The Missing Bureaucrat*, Christiansen says:

*I wanted to write genuine Communist music, dyed-in-the-wool tones. Out with EEC music, electrophonics and cryptic musical excesses, Darmstadt waffle and the maimed oriental philosophical imports, smokescreens, evasive chitchat. Onwards with progressive humanity. Universal basic income. Land and the means of production should belong to all of us, and we should all benefit from them. Symbolically, my hope hangs on the tones of the film's final piano waltz, played by real human hands.*

- **Young artists in conversation with Christiansen**

The exhibition includes three all-new works. Mira Winding contributes with murals created especially for this exhibition. Composer and musician Anders Lauge Meldgaard has re-composed one of Christiansen's works for a new video work that will be publicly screened for the very first time at the museum. The artist group LOL Beslutning's work *Destina & Destine and the Eight-eyed Scorpion* reworks parts of the libretto from Christiansen's crime thriller opera.

### Practical details

#### ***Christiansen in High Seas***

*Neoromanticism in Henning Christiansen's 1970s art*  
19 January – 22 April 2018

#### **For more information and pictures**

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#### **Press photos**

Available for download from the [museum website](#)

## Facts

### LP reissue

To coincide with this exhibition, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Institut for Dansk Lydarkæologi have reissued the album *Satie i høj sø* [Satie in High Seas] by Henning Christiansen. Priced at DKK 150, the vinyl album is available online and from the museum shop alongside the exhibition catalogue.

### Henning Christiansen at the Museum of Contemporary Art

The Museum of Contemporary Art focuses on hybrid art forms, sound art and new media. This means that shedding light on Henning Christiansen's overlooked practice is a perfect fit for the museum. The exhibition *Christiansen in High Seas* ties in with a new display of the museum's archives and collections. The display of works from the collection will change regularly, and several works by Christiansen from the museum's own collection and archives will be on display over the course of the exhibition period. For example, visitors will be able to see the installation *Schafe Statt Geigen* (1989), the score for the conceptual work *Grundtone* [Keynote] (1984) and *Informations* (1965).

### Henning Christiansen in brief

Henning Christiansen (1932–2008) was a composer and visual artist. He was part of the Fluxus movement and of Den Eksperimenterende Kunstscole [The Experimental Art School], generally known as Eks-skolen. He collaborated regularly and closely with Danish artist Bjørn Nørgaard and German performance artist Joseph Beuys.

After being involved in Fluxus, Christiansen contributed to a new break within European contemporary classical music – the so-called *New Simplicity* movement. A minimalist, conceptual form of music that strove for objectivity and sought to avoid narrative.

In 1968 Henning Christiansen married the artist Ursula Reuter Christiansen. Around 1970 he became involved in the Communist Party of Denmark and moved to the island of Møn. This coincided with a marked break within Christiansen's own practice: he began to compose music in a very different, narrative neoromantic style reminiscent of Carl Nielsen and Erik Satie. He composed music for a wide range of Danish films. The exhibition *Christiansen in High Seas* focuses on these neoromantic works. Later, in 1985, he was appointed professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg and went on to create a large quantity of visual works, performances and installations. Christiansen's works are enjoying a resurgence in interest in recent years – particularly his works on tape, several of which are currently being released as vinyl albums.

### Curator Magnus Kaslov about the exhibition:

*The change that takes place in Henning Christiansen's works around 1970 has been a great mystery to me. His art has taken many twists and turns along the way, but the most mysterious – and the one that has remained unexplored the longest – is the one that this exhibition can now shed light on: how could this artist, who contributed to creating a simple, pared-back and conceptually stringent vein of art music – make a complete turnaround to compose something that sounds like Carl Nielsen and Erik Satie? The answer turns out to be inextricably linked to Christiansen's political beliefs and his hopes for humanity. Taking a closer look at this particular aspect of his practice is very relevant at this particular point in time; a time when the contemporary art scene once again seems ready to accommodate earnestness and deeply felt emotions.*

### Annual themes at the Museum of Contemporary Art

Each year, the museum addresses a particular overall theme. In 2016 the theme was *Migration*, and in 2017 it was *Global Economies*. The theme for 2018 is *Communities*. The annual theme supports the museum's mission of working with social, cultural and environmental challenges in order to affect our present and future.

In collaboration with

Henning Christiansen's Archives



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